

TOWARDS HARMONY

A journey through Lent

Summary

Dennis' sermon "Towards Harmony" in the series "Transformation by Baptism" focuses on renewing baptismal promises and living in harmony as Easter approaches. Emphasised commitment is based on trust in Christ, rejecting evil, advocating justice. Sermon highlights God's presence in all situations, encourages confronting injustice, and embracing transformation through faith and baptism. Emphasises seeking a revolution of faith during Easter, stepping away from hindrances, pursuing justice, and embracing the blessings of new life.

Icebreaker

What is the most hilarious prank you have ever pulled off or been a part of?

Question 1

How can we renew our baptismal commitment to live in harmony with others?

Dennis focused on the importance of renewing our baptismal promises by living in ways that bring about transformation for ourselves and those around us.

What are some specific actions or changes in your life that would demonstrate a renewed commitment to live in harmony with others?



Lord, help us to leave behind habits of selfishness, fear and bitterness. Free us from everything that weighs down our souls, clouds our eyes and chills our hearts. In return we know that your love will give wings to our souls, light to our eyes and warmth to our hearts.

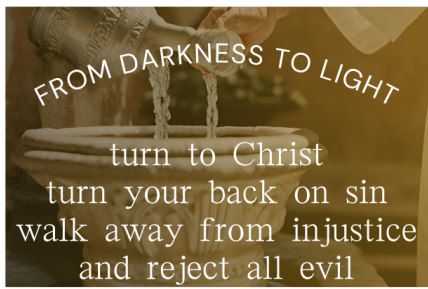
Juliette Hughes

So many words

Throughout the Lenten journey, many of us here at St Peter's have been journeying through the Lenten Study *Living in Harmony*. In a week when many of our liturgies are full of words and concepts, I would like to save time overloading our cerebral journey towards an intense, profound and transformational time of the year.

Renewing our Baptismal Commitment

When we come to the joy of Easter morning, we will all renew for ourselves our baptismal covenant. I considered changing the promises we will use to those of the APBA. I decided at the last minute not to – but instead, keep them shaped in the three-fold commitment of the Book of Common Prayer. I won't bother you for many reasons, given that my thesis in College was entitled "The changing roles of godparents in baptismal liturgies between 1537 and 1662. Whilst the promises the godparents offered never changed in words, the rubrics and the red print in italics indeed went on something of a revolution. Personally, bring out the dead! More should be done!



Question 2

What does it mean to understand that God is with us, no matter what?

One of the key points in the sermon series is the unwavering presence of God in all aspects of our lives, even the difficult times.

Can you recall a difficult time in your life where you experienced God's presence, and how did that affect the situation and your faith?

Question 3

How can we confront injustice and abandon evil in our lives?

The sermon discussed the importance of challenging injustice and renouncing all forms of evil, using the story of Jesus overturning the marketplace in the temple as an example.

What are some practical steps that you can take to confront injustice and evil in your personal life, your community, or the world?

To understand what we will do, our book's last page today contains a simple meme of what it means to commit ourselves as baptised in the blood of the Lamb, made one with Christ in the Resurrection from the Dead, and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

Put, turn to Christ, turn your back on sin, walk away from injustice (advocating for the marginalised in the process) and reject all that is evil.

To be baptised is to transform harmony and authenticity. It is a transformation that does not require us to ascent to a concept but to adopt a way of life that not only gives us life but also helps others live in ways that are truly transformational for themselves and those with whom they live.

During the first week, our study began with a quote from one of my favourite lecturers at the Melbourne College of Divinity, Fr. Andy Hamilton. According to Mark, Lent begins with the wonderfully simple words of the Gospel. "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ." Immediately, Jesus himself is baptised and is driven into the desert to be tested.

Fr. Andy reminds us that Jesus' story reminds us that God is with us in all our lives, hard places, and questions. We can remember the treasures, times, and locations of God's presence. So, point one: GOD IS WITH US, NO MATTER WHAT.

In Week 2, our lectionary varied from the Transfiguration story that we heard prior to Lent. We heard that we must deny our selfishness, take up our burdens, and follow Jesus. For in following Jesus, if God is for us, who can be against us?

On the third Sunday, the conflict between the all-in-one stop of the Temple market was overturned angrily, and Jesus predicted his death. It was a moment of anger, cleansing, and warning about worshipping false gods, including money.

The week of love, Mothering Sunday, reminds us that we are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works God has already designated to make up our way of life. It is not a matter of all being predestined or controlled but rather of all of us accepting that this is the best that Christ Jesus desires for us.

Question 4

What does it mean to be God's work of art, created for a purpose?

On Mothering Sunday, the sermon focused on the idea that each person is created by Christ for a unique purpose, emphasising openness to unexpected changes and opportunities.

What do you believe your unique purpose is in life, and how can you be open to the unexpected changes and opportunities that God may send your way?

Question 5

What lessons can we learn from Jesus' humble entry into Jerusalem on an untested colt?

In analysing Jesus' grand entry into Jerusalem, the sermon emphasises the importance of embracing the surprises that Christ brings into our lives and challenging the status quo.

How can we apply the humility and willingness to challenge the status quo in our own lives, while also following Jesus' example of advocating for justice and peace?

Prayer: see page 1

In doing so, we encounter the possibility of many changes in our status quo as surprises or unexpected opportunities provide us with an immeasurable richness to live out the love of God in our lives, honouring our neighbours as ourselves.

All of this is transformational. It requires us to undertake a spiritual stock-take and begin again. It is not a matter of maintaining our status quo, writes George Moore, principal of the Australian Institute of Theology, but respecting the surprises that, through Christ, will seek us out.

And so, we arrive today at the reading of the grand entry into the villages around Jerusalem and the scattering of stubble, weeds, and clothing. Yes, you heard correctly. Not once today in the scriptures does Jesus triumphantly enter Jerusalem, and not one palm is discarded.

Most place names have meanings. Bethpage, where all the drama begins, is on the side of the Mount of Olives. The name means “the place of unripe figs.” The time is close, but not yet. Next, after wandering to the Temple, Jesus returns to Bethany, which means “the place of the poor” or “the ripe figs.”

We can read into the scriptures a theory about Lazarus, Martha and Mary, and even Simon the Leper, but it is not there. What is there is the story of the colt and the celebration of Jesus' arrival using all they had.

The humility of this arrival on an untested colt, probably still having that new donkey smell, leads Jesus through a journey across robes, weeds, and branches. History suggests that if you start a revolution, change will come from the very poor, the anawim, as Luke calls them. Viva le revolution!

The revolution we face is one of turning back towards Jesus. We are asked to step away from all that holds us back. We are to challenge injustice and renounce all that is evil, be it personified or internalised.

This is the revolution of our faith required of us this Easter Day. This is the transformation of our lives that we will make as we stand at the front. It is the shock we will feel as water is impelled over us. It is the beginning of our new lives.

It is the embracing of all the surprises that the God of loaves and fishes invites us to share on the lakes on that glorious Easter Dawn.